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CIA chief labels Iran responsible for terror

By Tom Diaz
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Central Intelligence Agency Director William J. Casey told a conference three months ago that there is enough evidence to hold the Iranian government responsible for terrorist acts carried out by radical Shi'ite groups such as the one that hijacked a TWA jetliner last month.

"There is today . . . sufficient evidence that radical Shi'ite terrorists are responsive to Iranian guidance and receive Iranian support on a constant basis, for us to hold Tehran responsible for their attacks against United States citizens, properties, and interests," Mr. Casey told a conference on terrorism at Tufts University's Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in Medford, Mass., on April 17.

The speech has not been reported previously in major press outlets but will be published soon in a compendium of the conference proceedings.

Mr. Casey also named the Soviet Union as the sponsor of the current surge in international terrorism.

"In providing terrorist movements with arms, training and political support, the Soviet Union and its allies, the radical states, have discovered a highly cost-effective way of making their point — that in today's world, it is not safe to practice democracy," he said.

Mr. Casey outlined in a lengthy talk "how the American intelligence community assesses this dreadful scourge, and how I think we . . . need to deal with it."

He called international terrorism "a pitiless war without borders," and said "we cannot and will not abstain from forcible action to prevent, preempt, or respond to terrorist acts where the conditions justify — the knowledge justifies — the use of force."

He said the United States should be "prepared to direct a proportional military response against bona fide military targets" of countries that direct terrorist actions against the United States.

"We need not insist on absolute evidence that the targets were used solely to support terrorism," Mr. Casey said. "Nor should we need to prove beyond all reasonable doubt that a particular element or individual in that state is responsible for specific terrorist acts."

He said the United States cannot "permit terrorists and their sponsoring states to feel . . . that our response is going to be so bogged down in interminable consultations or debates that we, in fact, do not really have a deterrent."

"In my view," he said, "Western nations have, on the whole, been weak in applying economic, political and diplomatic sanctions."

In what now appears an almost prophetic forecast of the demands made last month by radical Shi'ite terrorists, Mr. Casey said "radical states . . . see in terrorism the potential for obtaining concessions from other states that can never be attained by traditional diplomatic means."

A central demand of the TWA hijackers was the release of 735 Lebanese interred in Israel who were seized by the Israeli Army during its withdrawal from Lebanon.

"Our very ability to endure in our policies is being called into question by terrorism," Mr. Casey said. "Unless we deal effectively with terrorism, our international credibility will be seriously weakened."

In the course of his talk, Mr. Casey did not flinch from naming specific countries and groups as responsible for "state-supported terrorism used as an instrument of foreign policy."

"The chief protagonists of this departure in international murder are Iran, Syria and Libya," he said. "Probably more blood has been shed by Iranian-sponsored terrorists during the last few years than by all other terrorists combined."

Mr. Casey said that during 1983 the United States identified "as many as 50" terrorist attacks with "confirmed or suspected Iranian involvement."

"Most of these incidents occurred in Lebanon, where radical Shi'ias of the Hezbollah, or Party of God, operated with direct Iranian support from terrorist bases in the Syrian-controlled Bekaa Valley."

Mr. Casey said that these groups "to protect themselves from direct retribution," used the "umbrella trade name" of "Islamic jihad."

He said that Libyan leader "[Muammar] Qaddafi is not in the Ayatollah Khomeini's league," but added that two bombings during 1984 in England were traced to Libyan agents or "surrogates."

"I must say that these attacks in highly populated British cities have passed without significant response," Mr. Casey said.